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THE ALTERNATIVES  
OF  
FAITH AND UNBELIEF

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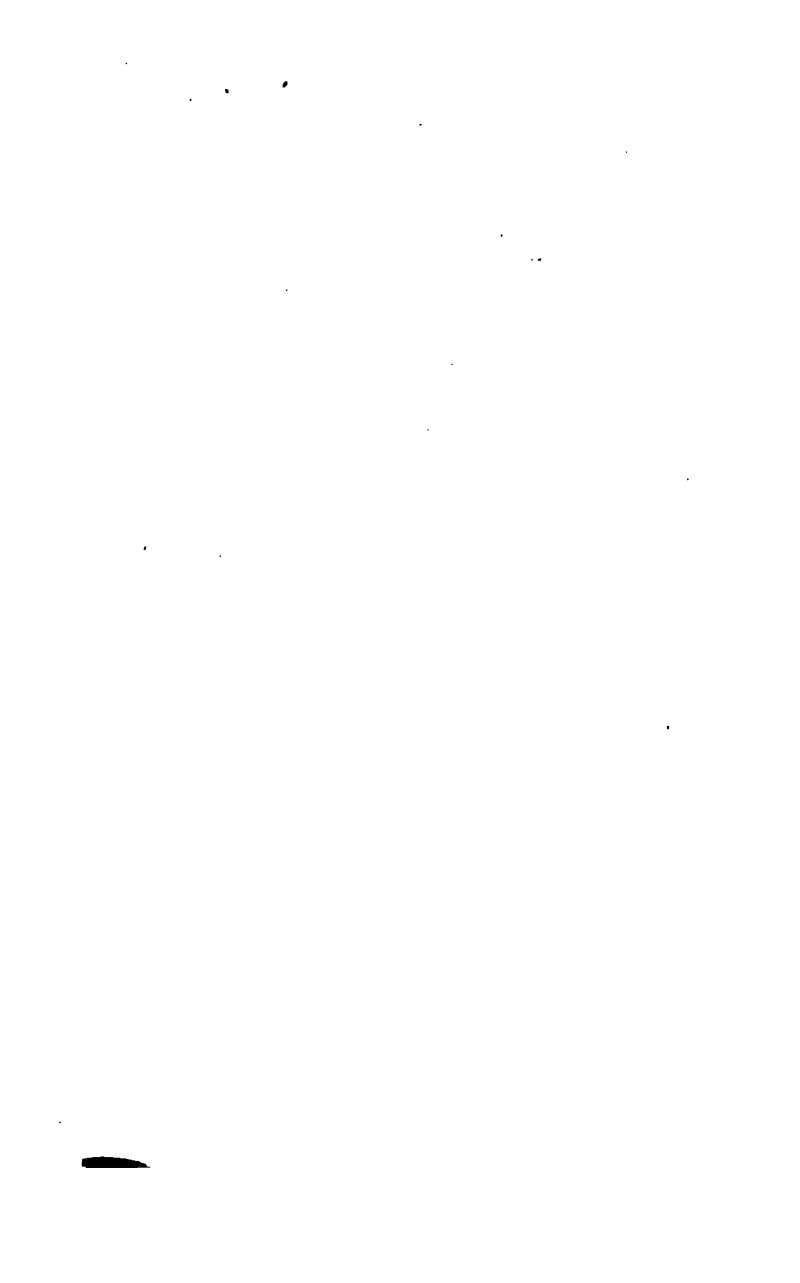


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REV. C. STANFORD, D.



THE ALTERNATIVES OF FAITH  
AND UNBELIEF.



# THE ALTERNATIVES OF FAITH AND UNBELIEF.

BY

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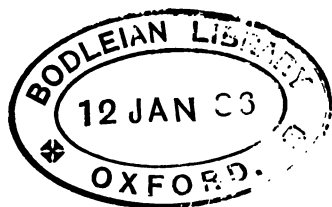
*"Voices from Calvary," etc.*

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,  
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# The Alternatives of Faith and Unbelief.



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

THIS is a short study on a great subject. It is presented in this form in the hope of helping, in some degree, doubters who are sorry to be doubters, and who tell us that although they are unwilling to deny, they are unable to accept, the articles of dogmatic Christianity. All through I shall take leave to speak in the first person, not, however, in the spirit of egotism, but only because this seems to be the most simple, most free, most natural and convenient style when one friend is speaking to another, as now. Assuming, as a matter of course, that my antagonist in opinion is as sincere as I am, and as much wishes to be right as

I do, let me invite him to leave, for the present, the question of evidences, and to examine with me the question indicated in our title page.

First: *glance at the alternative faith which unbelief implies and necessitates.* It appears to me that, generally speaking, this is not thought of. You may probably have an undefined impression that non-Christianity is something purely negative, and that, by taking the side of unbelief, you simply get rid of all trouble and difficulty connected with faith. By unbelief, however, you only exchange one faith for another; your negative is tantamount to another affirmative; you pass from believing that a certain article is true, to believing that it is not true; in giving up the Christian faith you adopt an alternative faith with its alternative issues.

Archbishop Whately says:—"It is important to keep in mind the self-evident, but often-forgotten maxim, that *disbelief is belief*, only that they have reference to *opposite conclusions*; e.g., to disbelieve the real existence of the city of Troy is to believe that it was feigned; and which

conclusion implies the greater credulity is the question to be decided. To some it may appear more, to others less probable, that a Greek poet should have celebrated, with whatever exaggerations, some of the feats of arms in which his countrymen had actually been engaged, than that he should have passed by all these and resorted to such as were wholly imaginary. So, also, though the terms 'infidel' and 'unbeliever' are commonly applied to one who rejects Christianity, it is plain that to *dis*believe its Divine origin is to believe its human origin; and *which* belief requires the more credulous mind is the very question at issue."<sup>1</sup>

You may imagine that these statements fail to touch you, because you assert yourself to be not an unbeliever, but simply an Agnostic—that is, you believe that "it is both impossible and unnecessary for you or for any one else to know anything with certainty about the supernatural things which Christians profess to believe." Well, then, on the one hand, you really must be regarded as an unbeliever, for you cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, Part I., Chap. II., Sect. 5.


believe in that of which you know nothing ; on the other, you are a believer, for you believe that it is both impossible and unnecessary for you or anyone else to know anything with certainty about the supernatural things in which Christians profess to believe—such, for instance, as the doctrine of God, of the Son of God, of the Holy Spirit, of prayer, of salvation, or of the future life. Do not imagine that you are clear of the responsibility that is connected with having a faith, or that you are neutral, or that yours is simply a “non-committal” principle. Jesus Christ, pointing to His Gospel, says : “He that believeth shall be saved ; he that believeth not shall be condemned.” You, in reply, say : “Lord, I believe, I believe ; but I believe the very opposite of this. I believe that Thy proclamation is not true, or is not certain, or is not important.”

You make a great venture, truly, as we do, though in another direction ; and I think we shall be able to show that yours is a much harder profession of faith than ours.

Secondly : this alternative faith must have its *alternative consequences*. Most likely you understand that they include certain

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advantages, such as these—less credulity, less bondage, less fear, more enlightenment, and, somehow, more delightful charm. Let us see.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE BEING OF GOD.

I. Take the Christian creed as to the Being of God. This is summed up in the formula: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." When a man declares that he does not accept this article of faith, of course he gives up all the advantages connected with it; and we now simply ask: What are the alternative advantages?

(1.) *One, as you have probably been told, is this, that in adopting the creed of unbelief in the being of a God, you have the honour of sharing the sentiment of the most advanced, active, and independent thinkers.* It would indeed be something to feel yourself to be parted in religious faith only from persons who have taken their faith from others, whose religious language is only the correct echo of approved phrases, or who are lowest in the scale of knowledge and

culture. There must be a great comfort in being backed in your opinions by the great majority of sensible people ; and in this circumstance, if unquestionable, your creed would find, if not a proof of its truth, a presumption in its favour. This would certainly be an advantageous alternative, as far as it might go ; therefore it is worth while just to look at it on our way to higher considerations.

Before you build on this, however, make yourself sure that it is an established fact. I think it is not. This, at least, is certain, that many of the keenest students of humanity in all ages have thought that Atheism, socially adopted, so far from being a mark of the highest human condition, is only possible, and hardly possible, in the lowest. They have held that the idea of a God is the result of the common sense and presentiment of mankind ; that, as a rule, it is found wherever man is found ; and that when, as an exception, it is absent, this absence is a defect, as much so, says an old Platonist, "as the absence of courage from a lion, horns from an ox, or wings from a bird. Man is naturally and



differentially a religious animal, and is never thoroughly or normally himself unless when he is so.”<sup>1</sup> Such, in substance, is the language of Socrates in the *Memorabilia*.<sup>2</sup> “There is no nation,” says Cicero, “so barbarous, no one, of all men, so wild, as that some apprehension of the gods has not tintured his mind; many think corruptly of them, which is the effect of vicious custom; but all believe there is a Divine power and nature. Nor has men’s talking and agreeing together effected this. It is not an opinion settled in men’s minds by public constitutions and sanctions; but in every matter the consent of all nations is to be reckoned a law of nature.”<sup>3</sup> Another famous ancient writes: “If one travel the world, it is possible to find cities without walls, without letters, without kings, without wealth, without coin, without schools and theatres; but a city without a temple, or that uses no worship, prayers, . . . no one ever saw.”<sup>4</sup> Many similar quotations might be made both from

<sup>1</sup> *Maximus Tyrius*, Diss. I.    <sup>2</sup> So rendered by Prof. Blackie.

<sup>3</sup> *Tuscul. Quaest.*, Lib. I. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Plutarch adversus Colotem*, quoted by John Howe.

classic and Christian writings, but I shall only add this one from Fenelon: "Man thinks of the infinite as he thinks of the circle, of the line, of the distinction between whole and part." <sup>1</sup>

We must allow that some of these assertions are too absolute. All cautious and severe examiners of evidence relating to some of the questions thus opened are of opinion that we must wait for data more settled and sure before we can be ready with such a conclusive verdict; many dissent from it altogether.

Mr. Herbert Spencer, we are told, is busy collecting information with a view to prove that deaf-mutes, and other persons mentally isolated, have no sense of a Supreme Being as the Creator and Governor of the universe, and so to establish the inference that such a sense is not an instinct of human nature.

Explorers have been known to report the discovery of more than one tribe found without the slightest idea of a God. Of the Andaman Islanders, for instance, it is said, "they have no conception of a Supreme

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<sup>1</sup> *De l'Existence de Dieu*, Premier Partie, p. 60.

Being. They have never risen from the effects they see around them, even to the most imperfect notion of a cause. They have never ascended in thought from the works to a creator, or even to many creators—that is to say, Polytheism.”<sup>1</sup>

At present, however, facts appear to justify us in holding that the sages whose opinions we have quoted are substantially right, that man has a natural belief in the existence of a God. With regard to Mr. Herbert Spencer, even if he should succeed in making out his statistics, we shall say that mental isolation is not the natural condition of man, and that in this condition, and in it from birth, it is probable that no single instinct of his nature would have fair development. With regard to the reports that have come to us of whole tribes existing without the least impression of a Divine Being, we think that some of these reports have not been sufficiently sifted and tested. Testimonies differ; for example, while Dr. Monat speaks in the terms just quoted, respecting the Andaman

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<sup>1</sup> *Adventures and Researches among the Andaman Islanders.*  
By Dr. F. T. Monat.

Islanders, Colonel Symes observes: "their religion is the simple but genuine homage of nature to the incomprehensible Ruler of the universe, expressed in adoration of the sun, the moon, and the *genii* of the woods." We must remark, that testimony is gathering which appears already strong enough to convince us that if savages are now without this idea, they originally had it, and have only lost it by sinking into the savage condition. Even South Sea cannibals and the aboriginal human creatures of Australia are not without relics of a primitive belief in a Creator. In Southern Africa, among tribes of whom Dr. Moffat says that they know nothing of God, nothing of eternity, and that we can scarcely conceive of human beings descending lower in the scale of ignorance and vice, he discovered, in the etymology of a word which had ceased to convey any distinct meaning, the fossil impression of a dead faith (once living) in "One above."<sup>1</sup> Similar cases might be named.

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<sup>1</sup> Moffat's *Missionary Labours and Researches in South Africa*.

Bearing on the alternative under discussion, these things are now tolerably clear—that men do not *sink* into believing in the existence of God—that when they do thus believe, it is not because they are “low in the scale of knowledge and culture”—and that if any tribe has been found without an idea of God, it is not a tribe of “free, advanced and active thinkers,” fellowship with whom might almost seem like a patent of intellectual nobility, but a tribe of savages now sunk into the lowest stage of human degeneracy, and living only on the level of animal existence.

(2.) *You tell me that one alternative advantage is, that unbelief in the being of a God has the sanction of science.* Are you sure of this? I am inclined to assert that when a physicist announces “there is no God,” he announces, not his discovery, but his opinion, which we are at liberty to take for what it is worth. He may, indeed, say with confidence that he himself has not discovered God; he may say that as far as he has been able to feel about in the depths of ether, to probe for the core of things, and to pry into the secret spring-work of life,—

all he can find is a vast and wonderful complex of something that acts, called force, and something that is acted on, called matter,—he may say that, to him, all vital forces are fundamentally unknowable; all ultimates, mysteries; and that, although he can strike out all kinds of flashes from the grand electric apparatus of nature, and get no end of insight into cosmic law, he has not yet been able to lay his finger on God! But has he, therefore, a right to declare, as from the throne of science, that no God exists? Not so! our instruments of knowledge and discovery are of use, each only in its own department. You do not learn music by the study of metaphysics, nor logic by the study of anatomy; nor the magnitude of the planets, the height of the atmosphere, or the cause of the tides by the study of earths and alkalies. The telescope can tell us nothing about an infusorial point, nor a microscope about a star. On the same principle, science can tell us nothing about what is beyond science. We feel assured that science, properly so called, and revelation, properly so called, are in perfect harmony,

and will be shown, one day, to reveal glorious truth that is one. But each has its own sphere of discovery; the province of the naturalist is nature, not what is outside it—the universe, not the question of an existence distinct from the universe—he may speak with authority on matters within the focus of his own lens, not on matters beyond that focus. Trying to find out by any one faculty what can only be found out by another faculty, is only trying to find out what lies at the back of knowledge. Science may, for the present, altogether decline to vote in this election; but you may depend upon this: that science will not vote for unbelief; its utmost decision only confirms, from age to age, the apostolic dictum, “The world by wisdom knew not God.”

(3.) *It may be suggested that a third gainful alternative is this—in giving up the Christian idea of a first cause for some other theory of causation, we can find a creed that is easier to understand.* You still think that science has fewer difficulties than revelation. I doubt it.

The following is the report of remarks lately

made by a distinguished physician: "For Christian ministers to meet the requirements of the present day was no mean or easy task. He was not quite sure whether too much attention was not paid to apologetics, properly so called. To be able to show that there were *as many difficulties and inscrutable things in connection with science as in connection with religion* was in itself an important thing. Scientific men in the present day were in the habit of using a certain number of fundamental terms, about which not one of them could give any precise information as to what is their real meaning. They talked of atoms, molecules, matter, and so forth, but they knew no more about what these were than did Theocritus when he made use of them in connection with his ingenious speculations. So with regard to force, law, matter. It was known that something existed amazingly powerful, but of its real essence nothing was known; and a calm investigation of all these fundamental principles of science would not be found to be more free from difficulties and from impossibility of explanation than were the



great verities of the Christian religion. There were, however, a great many excellent Christians among the scientists, and it was not to be supposed that actual advance in science made by them would not eventually be of any use in the confirmation of the Gospel. It would ultimately have its proper place in developing the great plans of God throughout the world." <sup>1</sup>

You still cling to the notion that questions relating to the origin of the universe only fall within the province of science, and that, by the aid of science, you can find a faith easier to hold than any other. How? Atheism is inconceivable apart from some refinement or other of Materialism. Let us, therefore, look for a moment at the interpreting principle of the Materialist. When I say, as any other plain man might say, only a poet can make a poem, only a printer can print it, only a binder can bind it into a book like this in my hand, he answers: No; I have a

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<sup>1</sup> Address at New College, London, by Sir J. Risdon Bennett, President of the Royal College of Physicians.

theory as to the origin of that book much easier to understand than yours, and it is this—One day, certain types that had been made by accident, were shot out of the foundry by accident, they flung themselves by accident on to some paper that lay handy by accident, and stamped on that paper, by accident, these “thoughts that breathe and words that burn.”

He may not utter this precise language about my book, but he virtually does so about the book of nature. Speaking of the great poem that we call the universe, he declares that mind had nothing to do with its origin, and that the place of thought in the order of its processes is not first, but last. Is this easier to understand than the Christian creed? Is there less mystery in the assumption that matter made mind—that a certain quality, quantity, and relation of atoms and atomic forces will account for—ourselves—that men and midges, now so happy in the sunshine, all descend from the same ancestral stock—that virtue and vice, sugar and vitriol, are alike material products—that conscience is only “a transformed

sensation"—that worship is only a result of chemistry—that wit and wisdom, thought and love, justice and righteousness, all sprang originally from "a speck of palpitating slime!" Is this faith less mysterious than faith in a Creator? There is no escape from mystery by this road, but simply emergence from a mystery of light into a mystery of darkness. If infinities are comparable, the mystery of a universe, with a first constructive reason, is nothing to the mystery of a universe without one; the mere suggestion makes my brain swim and my reason angry. Why, even a brick wall is thought about before it is built. For my own part, I should find infinitely more difficulty in believing that even a lucifer match made itself than in holding the popular faith about its origin; and I say, with Lord Bacon, "I had rather believe all the fables of the Legend, the Talmud and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind."

One answer to this may be: "You could make any system look absurd if you leave out the explanations by which its advocates

make it look reasonable ; and you are doing this in the present case." Then let us look at your explanations. When we do so, and our minds try to work out the various theories of Atheism, the only result they can reach is, not Atheism, but a kind of unsatisfactory and most mysterious Theism.

One theorist endeavours to account for the universe by the suggestion of *invariable sequence* ; but this is only substituting the idea of process for that of cause ; and the longest process as much implies an adequate cause as the shortest. The regularity of sequences in nature will no more do away with the necessity of a causer, than the invariable movement of a piston in a cylinder will render superfluous the supposition of an engine-maker.

Another varies his language a little, and calls nature a "*grand chain of causation*." The image is old as Homer,<sup>1</sup> who, having in his mind, perhaps, the vast series of

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<sup>1</sup> Εἰ δ' ἄγε, πειρήσασθε θεοί, ἵνα εἰδῆτε πάντες,  
Σειρὴν χουσεῖην ἐξ οὐρανόθεν κρεμάσαντες,  
Πάντες δ' ἐξάπτεσθε θεοί, πᾶσαι τε θείωναι.

*Iliad*, Lib. viii., 18, 19, 23.

causes and effects pendent in nature, speaks of a certain "golden chain"; but then he thinks of the first link of it as in the hand of Jupiter, who lets it down to earth. So, when we think of causes and effects as a chain, however long, if we follow our natural instincts, we must go back in thought until we come to the first link of the chain, and think of the hand that holds it.

Another asserts *the doctrine of evolution*, which we may thus formulate:—

"From lower to higher, from simple to complete—  
This is the pathway of the eternal feet;  
From earth to lichen, herb to flowery tree,  
From cell to creeping worm, from man, to what shall  
be."<sup>1</sup>

Be it so; and when science makes this doctrine certain we shall accept it gladly; but even then we shall say evolution implies an evolver. Professor Huxley, without intentional reference to this argument, helps to confirm it by his remark, that the evolutionist must "assume a primordial molecular arrangement, of which all the phenomena of the universe are the consequences." Yes; but that "arrangement"

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Morris.

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necessitates an arranger. The question : *Who* or what did the work, is not answered by the answer to another question—the question : *How* was it done? In our judgment, each theory of Materialism utterly fails to establish Atheism.

Many who hold this principle will assure us that we do not understand it—that they are no more Atheists than we are—that they do not deny the existence of God any more than we do ; but only of such a God as Christians believe in. Professor Tyndall, for instance, in words that have often been quoted, says : “ I am bound to confess that I discern in matter the promise and potency of every form and quality of life ; but this is not Atheism, for the whole process of evolution is the manifestation of a power that is absolutely inscrutable to the intellect of man.” But to deny personality to God is to deny God. To think of God only as “ something more subtle than electricity, but absolutely devoid of consciousness, and with no more feeling than the force that lifts the tides ”—to think of God as an essence without mind or morals—to think of Him as having no name but

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“inscrutability,” or as “an unknown entity”—to think of Him not as a Father, but as a “great question” or as “a theorem” to be proved, or as “a good working hypothesis”—to think of Him as unable to hear prayer—to think of Him as a helpless God, from whose control the universe has escaped, like a train from a conductor in a fit—“to keep the convenient, majestic word, but to discard the person meant by it”;<sup>1</sup> to keep it, yet to say that all things are ruled, not by God, but by law; to keep it, because to drop it would be to drop all grandeur out of thought, all fire out of language, all music out of eloquence, the keystone out of reasoning, the heart out of charity, is to hold it in a way that is utterly evasive and delusive. It is to find nothing and to know nobody outside the universe; it is practically to believe only as an Atheist believes. Rejecting the old creed, the alternative is not the adoption of a new creed easier to understand, but of one that leaves the unthinkable mystery of creation just where it was, only adding to it many new mysteries.

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Alford.

“You still misunderstand us,” will be said by the disciples of at least one school of unbelievers; “our religion is absolutely free from the mystery of the infinite, for we have no god but ‘humanity.’” Whatever you mean by humanity, if you mean your fellow-men, you mean imperfect beings; and the nature of your god must include imperfection; and if you mean the whole of the human race—as the whole of that race is not yet born, the whole of your god is not yet in existence. We are in greater mystery than ever.

(4.) *It may be imagined that another alternative is, more happiness of a certain kind.* Certain men, in certain moods, might feel a certain kind of relief from believing that God does not exist. We have read in French story of a prisoner, in the door of whose cell a hole was cut, through which the eye of a warder looked upon him night and day. When the poor man dropped into a troubled sleep—when he started out of it—when he tried to eat his prison food—when he lifted his eyes to God in supplication—still it was there.



"Being observed

When observation is not sympathy,  
Is just being tortured."<sup>1</sup>

So awful was the sensation produced by that eye's clear ceaseless gaze, that, according to the sufferer's own confession, made in later years, though he had gone through many troubles and persecutions, all were as nothing in comparison with this. The eye of a man was a terror—there was no escape from it. There may be somewhere in the world a man who thinks of God's eye as just such a terror, and who is ready to cry, not in delight but in despair: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." Afraid of the truth of God, afraid of His holiness, afraid of His reckoning day, afraid of His eye, afraid of His hand, afraid even of His heart—such a man might be glad to believe

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

that the doctrine of God's existence is only a fiction of the priests. But such a man, we hope, will not be easily found. A man whose whole nature is alive and intense—a man, however sinful, who has some ray of hope left—would not willingly exchange belief in the searching eye of a Father in heaven for the weird consciousness expressed in Jean Paul's confession: "I wandered to the furthest verge of creation, and there I saw a socket where an eye should have been, and I heard the shriek of a fatherless world!"

A real thinker, even if he should now hold the atheistic tenet, will not be likely to think that it inspires happiness; he will be more likely to say, with Vauvenargues:<sup>1</sup> "It is impossible not to wish the Christian religion to be true." "To be in a universe without a God, is to be entangled in the grinding and wheeling of a great machine without guiding hand or animating soul." When, in a dream of the night, a voice whispers: "There is no God!" all at once "a trouble

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<sup>1</sup> *Meditation sur la foi.*

moves in the heart of the darkness"; I feel something indiscernible steal up to my pillow, and put an icy hand upon my heart; the clutch of no nightmare is so deadly, the blow of no spectre could so melt my strength away; I pant with fear; and when breath comes back to me, I say, as Frederick Robertson did, "It is an awful hour,—let him who has passed through it say how awful—when life has lost its meaning, when the grave appears to be the end of all things, human goodness nothing but a name, and the sky above this universe a dead expanse, black with the void from which God Himself has departed."

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST.

II. Proceed to weigh the alternatives of faith and unbelief in the claims of Jesus Christ. We know that a man may be a sincere Theist without being a Christian. He may go so far as to say: "I believe in God the Father Almighty," yet not be sure that he can add, with conviction, "and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord." This may be your case—what then?

(1.) *To doubt His claims is to stigmatize His character.* Before you look at any person's claims you look at his character. Look at the character of Christ as reflected in the mirror of the Scriptures, and you see a man who is undoubtedly better than the best, and fairer than the fairest reflected there. He is more patient than Job, meeker than Moses, wiser than Solomon, holier than Elijah, sublimer than Isaiah,

braver than John the Baptist, kinder than John the Divine. You see a man who never spoke a word that was not the right one, and never wrought a deed so that it could have been done better; you see a man of whom we can say: His life has stood the test of the most searching chemistry; the music of His name is above the music of every other name that ever made eyes flash and fill; His story is immeasurably more rousing, tender, and glorious than any other story of truth, patience, love, humility, sacrifice, and distinct resolute goodness.

The ancient antagonists of Christianity never called in question the human perfection of Christ; neither Celsus, Porphyry, nor Julian ever expressed a doubt on the subject. The arguments which they urged were not based on the denial of His absolute excellence, but on the assertion that the character of others—of Socrates, for instance, and of Apolonius of Tyana—was not less perfect; it is only in modern times that Christ's character has been assailed, but, even in the instances most frequently cited, not to the extent that has been

usually assumed. Priestley asserted that He was naturally as fallible and peccable as any other man; but he never ventured to assert that His character was not actually perfect, or that He was in any way a sinner. Francis Newman, in his work on the Phases of Faith, does, indeed, aim to show that there were imperfections in the character of Jesus; but the imperfections he specifies are only two: His burning indignation against the Pharisees, and His lack of sympathy, in the critic's own opinion, with what is bright and mirthful in human nature. Strauss denies the sinlessness of Jesus, not, however, from the specification of any actual facts, but from the *a priori* pantheistic notion of the inseparableness of sin from all finite existence. With a few exceptions—only proving the rule—even those who stand aloof from all the Churches see in His life the realised ideal of perfect humanity, and only find fault with Christians because they are not like Christ.

Such being the character of Jesus, *What are His claims?* His first claim, and that out of which spring all the others, is, that He

shall be received as the perfect manifestor of the Father ; according to His own showing, in many ways, His life was the visible visit of God to the human family.

We stand stunned with electric shock upon shock, as we listen to His self-revelations, when, at the close of His earthly ministry, He had taken leave of His disciples, and, on looking back at the way He had traversed, He had fearlessly said to the Father : " I have glorified Thee on earth," He added immediately : " And now, Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." In the visions of Patmos we hear Him say to the Churches : " I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." " I am the first and the last." " I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts ; and I will give to everyone of you according to your works"; " I am the root and the off-spring of David, and the bright and morning star." In words spoken by Himself or His messengers, He declares that all power in heaven and in earth has been given to

Him, that He is at the right hand of God ; that He gives the Holy Spirit ; that, although He is in heaven, He is still on earth ; that He is with us always, even to the end of time ; and that at last, seated on the throne of His glory, He will judge all nations.

Asserting this to be His sublime originality of mission, of course He claims to be counted sinless. According to His own account of Himself, expressed or implied, He is never weak, never rash, never wrong, never has to make an apology. While He urges all men to repent, He never repents ; while He teaches all men to pray for daily forgiveness, He never asks to be forgiven ; serene in a storm of crime, in the face of all His critics, He flings forth the fearless challenge : " Which of you convicteth Me of sin ? "

Of course He makes for Himself the most unbounded claims on our loving, loyal trust. As a Teacher His one thesis is *Himself*. As a Saviour He never releases attention from Himself. As giver of " the one thing needful " He offers to mankind no gift but the gift of Himself. He tells of



eternal life as consisting in the knowledge of Himself. Speaking to the lost, the best of men had always said: "Go to God"; Jesus always said: "Come to Me." Always the sage had said: "Accept my system"; the Saviour said, "Accept Me." In every variety of persuasive, imploring accent, He said to all souls: "Come to Me; leave all the world and come to Me; cling to Me, cling closer and yet closer, for without Me ye can do nothing."

He claims to stand alone in His glory as the Saviour and Lord of souls. By His own proclamations He is not merely one of the foundations on which man may build his eternal hope—but the only one. He is not merely one of the means by which the soul may live—but the only one. He is not merely one of the soul's good shepherds—but the only one. He is not one way out of many to the Father—but the only one. He is not a planet, or one of the stars—but the sun; and around Him all the constellations revolve. With entire simplicity, yet with unwavering tones of strength, He says: "I am the Bread of Life"; "I am the Way"; "I am" not a

vine—but “*the Vine*” ; “ I am the Light of the world.”

The Romans had a glorious temple dedicated to all the gods, and therefore called the Pantheon ; and once a certain emperor offered to give Christ a place in it. The Emperor Alexander Severus “performed acts of religious worship in his own private chapel (*larario suo*) to Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, and such - like gods, and the images of his ancestors.” The Germans have a Walhalla, borrowing the idea from an old Scandinavian mythology, a stately building dedicated to the memory of their national great ones ; so some of our own religious writers and lecturers seem to have a kind of Walhalla of the imagination, in which they do honour to the mighty dead, and in which, along with others, they honour Christ. Like the late Mr. Emerson, they would say : “When the gods come down among men, they are not known ; Jesus was not, Socrates was not, Shakespeare was not” ; and like him they would include Moses and Jesus, Zeno and Zoroaster in the same classification. But a place among the gods will

not do for Jesus,—He claims the whole temple.

Such claims from the lips of a merely human Rabbi could only have been spoken in the delirium of vanity. We abominate a self-assertive teacher of religion; we will not open our hearts to an egotist. You say that, although you are not prepared to own the tremendous claims of Jesus, you by no means deny that He was a perfect man. A perfect man! If you are justified in your denial of His assertions, how could that be possible? If you deny the truth of Christ's claims, after He has made them, you are netted and tangled in a forest of prodigious difficulties; and you have no alternative but the supposition that Jesus was not even a good man, or that He was in absolute ignorance of things which He professed to declare with absolute knowledge; or that He contradicted His own words; or that He was a deceiver, or that He was the victim of some other deceiver greater than Himself; and I ask, with awe, —Who could that be?

(2.) *If Christ is not to be trusted, then there has not been, to your knowledge, any personal*

*visit and revelation of God to this world.* Perhaps you say: "We have a revelation of God through His works." Yes; but though you have in His works a revelation of what God can *do*, you have no revelation of God *Himself*. Go into the workroom of a skilful mechanic, of whom you know nothing, and look round upon his works. "Well," says your companion, "what do you think of him? What kind of father is he? Is he a man of his word? Can you trust him? Can you love him?" You naturally answer: "I am sure that he is a real man, for here we have proofs of his existence, and that he is a good workman, for here are specimens of his good workmanship; but as to the question you ask, I must keep back the answer until I know the man himself." So, when I look on God's works, I see what God can do, but not what He *is*. We wait for a personal appearance.

Along with this consideration, bear in mind that the personal visit and manifestation we are thinking of now, is that of our Heavenly Father. If it could be said of certain children at school that never in

all their lives had they seen their father's face, and that he had never once paid them a visit, although he might with ease have done so, at any moment, in any day, the instant inference would be—"that is not a good father," or, "that is a most unaccountable case." We are not left with such hard thoughts about our Father in heaven; not in vain has He put into our hearts the cry—

"Show us Thy face, for we are Thine,  
Unknown, ineffable, divine!"

When we know this—when we know that "the high and lofty One" has actually translated Himself into human nature, has come to us within the boundaries of shape, through the conditions of time, and under the name of Jesus—of Jesus who says: "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him"; "I and My Father are one"; "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"—what do we think? Do we think that all this is too wonderful for belief? "Is God revealed more wonderful than God for ever

hid?" If He should please to reveal Himself, is it wonderful that He should adopt the best mode of doing so? And do we not all feel that a perfect human person is the most perfect conceivable form of personal revelation? For my own part, when the doctrine of the incarnation comes to me like a new reality, my mind strikes fire, my heart shouts, my homely common sense cries: "Just so! this is just like the Heavenly Father!"

But if we believe that, although Jesus has told us all this, it is not true, what can we think of Jesus, and what can we think of God? Unless you say that God has revealed Himself through some fitter medium, that is, through some better man than Jesus—which is impossible—you say that He has given to His family no personal manifestation of Himself; and you are shut up to the monstrous conclusion that God has not been all that might have been expected in a father; that He has not done for His children what you would have done for yours, and that perfection appears to be less kind, less thoughtful and less

ready to help its own, than does imperfection.

(3.) There is yet another necessity. If you still deny Christ's claims, *you are bound to show that it is more reasonable to deny than to own them.* And, in doing so, one of the first things we expect from you is to show that you can more easily account by your method than we can by ours, for the historic record of these claims. We are at present speaking, not of the Scriptures in general, but only of the four Gospel histories. "Well," says some critic, "I will undertake to plant my gun against these four histories, and blow them into myths." It is not for me to prejudicate, but, borrowing the words of a certain old soldier about a certain new gun, mounted for another kind of battle, my inward thought is: "I would rather stand before that gun than behind it."

If, however, you try this explosive method on these histories, you are bound to try it on all others. Up to the present time the result of such an experiment is a deepened conviction that we have in the Gospels the record of broad and patent facts untouched

by criticism, which have had their origin far within the limits of well-established history, and which belong, as much as any other established histories belong, to the common stock of our certain information. You say, No! Then, for the sake of argument, let us assume that the mythical theory is settled and sure, and that by means of this theory you can account for these narratives; that is, that you can rationally account for the letter by sacrificing the letter to the spirit—what then? Why, this: you must, in the first instance, account for *the human conception of Christ*. How did it come into the heart of man to conceive that, in Him, God came to reveal His love to sinners? There is nothing like this in any theology outside the Scriptures. "The gods never love," said an Indian to his missionary; and all religions but that of Christianity utter, in different ways, the same doctrine of despair. If, indeed, you still hold that a mere mortal might possibly have had such a dream, how do you account for the human conception of this Divine Visitor coming as "A man of sorrows," who was born in a stable, and who



died on a cross? If, whatever you have been tempted to let go, you cannot let go the dear belief that Jesus was divinely beautiful and sinless, and that at least you must go as far as Pilate did, and say: "I find no fault in this man," how do you account for the conception of this faultless life? And what kind of men were the inventors of this miraculous lie? Were they good men? No; for there can be no goodness without truth. Were they bad men? No; for goodness never can be created by badness; nature does not rise higher than its own level; sin will not knowingly fight against itself and proclaim its own disgrace.

Account for the human conception of Christ as furnishing *a perfect standard of character, suiting equally every land and every age*. "There has been no agreement among men as to what would be a perfect standard of character; the idea differs in different lands and in different ages. A Hebrew would have set up one standard, a Greek another, a Roman another, a Persian another; an inhabitant of China now has one ideal standard, a Hindoo

another, a New Zealander another; a nobleman has one idea, a philosopher another, a priest another; a Mandarin has one type, a Brahmin another, a Turkish Mufti another; a Pharisee had one, a Sadducee another, and one of the sect of the Essenes another; Anthony in Egypt and Benedict in Italy, founders of the Monastic system, one; Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier, another; a Roman Catholic priest has one idea, a Protestant minister another; a peasant of Galilee could hardly be supposed to have the same standard as that approved by a gentleman at Corinth."

Yet Christ, as He stands up from these pages, betrays no tincture of nationality, no mark made by the atmosphere of custom or the accidents of place. He has no small notions, He is the contemporary of all ages, and belongs equally to the men of every land.

Account for the merely human conception of such a Saviour of the world as Christ claims to be. A saviour who, without cry, without show, without pride, without wealth, without war in any visible battle-fields, should at once conquer and bless all

nations. The idea of such a saviour, when presented, was received by the Jew with mad rage, by the Roman with grim contempt, and by the Greek with a passing smile, as he said: "Foolishness!"

Account, on merely human principles, *for Christ's influence in the world from the day of His death until now.* No comforter, no "living sacrifice," no champion who ever stood shoulder to shoulder with his friend when, back to the wall, that friend had to face the fury of the world; no dear and old and faithful one to whom your hearts cry out: "Custom never tamed the music of thy voice, never stole the magic of thy beauty"—ever inspired such love as that which is kindled by the name of Jesus in the hearts of millions who belong to the most active and enterprising members of the human family.

It is matter of simple observation that no love is at this present moment working such wonders. How will you account for it while you reject His claims? You may recall a well-known passage in the life of Napoleon. "Conversing one day at St. Helena, as his custom was, about the great men of antiquity, and comparing himself

with them, he suddenly turned to one of his officers, and asked him: 'Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?' The officer hesitated. 'Well then,' said Napoleon, 'I will tell you.' He then compared Christ with himself, and with the great heroes of antiquity, pointing to the surpassing greatness of Jesus. 'I think,' said he, 'that I understand something of human nature, and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man; but not one is like Him. Jesus Christ was more than man. Alexander, Cæsar, and myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love.'"

Account for these grand originalities and this wonderful story, *as originating in the minds of a few common and unlettered men*; say, how came it to pass that mere boatmen from the Windermere of Galilee should happen to outshine all splendid kings of thought and language from the beginning of time—should beat mighty Milton, for instance, and change the history of the world by giving, in these words of eternal freshness, this picture of beautiful perfection.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BIBLE.

III. Now, look at the alternatives of faith and unbelief in the written record of revelation that we call the Bible. The common creed of Christians, with reference to this, is sufficiently summed up in the Sixth Article of the Church of England: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament whose authority was never any doubt in the Church." You may be tempted to give up this creed for the creed of unbelief. This creed of unbelief may be total or partial, and may take

various aspects, some of which let us consider, with a view to notice their alternatives.

(1.) *You may, perhaps, feel inclined to unbelief in the Bible as a whole, on the supposition that we need no Bible besides the four Gospels.* Your thoughts may have gone with mine up to the present point in this exercise—you may have assented to what has been said on the claims of Jesus—you may think His name the greatest ever sounded in this world—yet your very sense of its greatness may take the form just stated. It is a fashion of opinion that we see now beginning to prevail. Many who “profess and call themselves Christians” will say directly, or by implication, “We need no Bible beyond the fontal teachings and the central facts of our common Christianity given in the four Gospels.” On the one hand, they are willing to lay aside the *Old Testament*, and think we can do without it, as we can do without the scaffolding when the house is built, or as a person can do without the toys of infancy or the lessons of childhood when he becomes a man. On the other hand, they

can spare the *New Testament*, all but the part containing the writings of the four Evangelists. They feel as if the writings following these had not the same authority; that, indeed, they only contain the words of our fellow-servants, and not the very words of the Master Himself, as we are sure the four Gospels do. For instance, although they may be willing to quote Paul when their opinions coincide with his; when they do not, they do not hesitate to say so. They think him too theological, and would like to inform him that "religion is not a theology, but a life," and that we are saved by faith in a person, not by faith in certain propositions. Perhaps they might find, on a closer acquaintance, that his teachings are in agreement with this doctrine; though he certainly seems to think that a right life may be helped by a right theology, and that faith in the person of our Saviour may be strengthened, enlightened, and educated by means of faith in certain propositions. Still, they think that they can do very well without him and his apostolic brethren, so long as they have the four-fold biography.

It seems to me, that with this kind and measure of unbelief they are subject to the following alternatives: First, in slighting the *Old Testament* they are convicted of slighting Christ. This is the reverse of what they are supposed to do, for in discarding all the Bible outside the story of His life and death they say much of honouring Christ. Yet who that honours Christ can slight that which Christ honoured? He honoured the Old Testament by His constant reference to it and by His frequent quotations. He spoke with honour of "all the Prophets." He said: "I came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil." To the Jews He said: "Ye search the Scriptures, and these are they that testify of Me." He established His mission and expressly founds His message on the Mosaic revelation at large. When He said to an enquirer: "If thou wouldest inherit eternal life, keep the commandments," viz., the commandments given on Sinai, He taught that if any man kept the moral law, as given in the Old Testament, he would never die. He observed the typical institutions; His death fulfilled the Passover.



Secondly, it is equally clear that in slighting the *New Testament*, all but the section specified, they also dishonour Christ, though still under the show of honouring Him; and at the same time they wrong their own souls by withholding from them advanced information of vital importance given in the *New Testament*, by which term we now mean that part of the *New Testament* which follows the four Gospels. Many of Christ's own teachings are thus lost. For example, He says: "On this Rock will I build My Church." What is the Church? The answer is in the *New Testament*. He constantly refers, both in speech and action, to the Book of Leviticus. What is the meaning of that book? We learn from the *New Testament*, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." The story of this is told in the Gospels. The full explanation is given in the Epistles of the *New Testament*.

It is a mistake to think of Jesus only or chiefly as a teacher; He came less to interpret the Gospel than to *be* the Gospel and to *make* it; to supply the facts which furnish

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its conditions, and which inspired evangelists had afterwards to state and explain. The slow, gross and limited apprehensions of the disciples imposed a restraint on the teachings of Jesus, and He told them that it was reserved for the Spirit to lead them into all truth. In His last conversation with them, He said: "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now." What things? The things in the subsequent part of the New Testament. How did He say these things—by words? No; but by His own promised Spirit inspiring them in the writings of the New Testament. They were still His words, and the writers, as His secretaries, only took them down at His dictation. Hence we find them using such words as these: "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it; but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." "By revelation He made known to me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."

“Christ,” says John Milton, “gives no full comments or continued discourses, but speaks oft in monosyllables, like a master scattering the heavenly grain of His doctrine; like pearls, here and there, which requires a skilful and laborious gatherer.” His teaching was the seed-plot in which those great principles of evangelical truth were first sown which were to be transplanted and cultivated under the inspired ministry of the apostles, in fields further on. Whatever is essential to the Gospel is to be found, *in semine*, in words of our Lord, spoken during His earthly life; the doctrines contained in the writings of the apostles are not so properly new revelations, as the result of the opening of their eyes to understand those words, and bring out their wonderful meanings. So, under the idea of feeling and showing exalted Christian sentiment, they do—by slighting all the Bible but the four Gospels—slight the Saviour, to whom they owe a glory of adoring love, and slight their own souls.

(2.) *You may hesitate to accept the Bible as divinely true because of the alleged want of*

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*harmony between its statements and the discoveries of modern science.* It is likely that you have taken, not indeed to denial, but to the line of objection; and that your faith is much perplexed through being frequently in the sound of assertions like these: When the Gothic artist, in the imageries on cathedral wall or window, represents God in the likeness of a venerable man, he is but faithful to the anthropomorphism of the Bible, as seen in the accounts of His intercourse with Adam, with Noah, with Moses, and with other of the "young world's grey fathers." The man who looks upon this little earth as the centre of the starry universe, and who also thinks that the sun was made for the single purpose of lighting it by day, and the moon by night, is confirmed in his scientific doctrines by the very language of his Bible. The man who sees in all the geologic formations, in the innumerable medallions of creation,<sup>1</sup> and in the handwriting of God on the foundations of the everlasting hills, relics and memorials of work done by Him in six days, answering to the six days in

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Baker.

one of our weeks, proves his thesis' by reference to the Bible; the man who thinks that once upon a time a great flood covered both hemispheres from pole to pole, and swept into destruction a population large as that which lives on the earth now, bases his calculations on texts in the Bible.

Looking at the surface, no one will deny that the letter of Scripture seems at first to lend some sanction to some of these notions, and old Christian scientists always founded their scientific schemes on what they believed to be textual authority; they were apt to give chapter and verse for their astronomical doctrines—as, for instance, did Francis Turretin in this passage: "First, the sun is said in Scripture to move in the heavens, and to be at rest. To wit: 'The sun is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber'; 'The sun knoweth his going down'; 'The sun ariseth,' and 'The sun goeth down.' Secondly, the sun, by a miracle, stood still in the time of Joshua; and by a miracle it went back in the days of Hezekiah. Thirdly, the earth is said to be fixed immovably, as it is written, 'The earth also is established for ever'; 'Thou

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hast established the earth, and it abideth'; 'They continue this day according to Thine ordinances.'"

It is a mistake to say that Scripture countenances untruths in science; but we can see a certain peculiarity in its style that helps to account for this mistake. Before we look at this, let us look at the object for which it was written. Not to tell man what man could find out for himself; not to anticipate the discoveries of science; not to teach the secrets of nature, the mysteries of government, the resources of trade, the structure of language; not to teach the farmer how to plough the land, nor the sailor how to drive the ship's "plunging ploughshare" through the wilderness of the waves; not to settle questions in chronology, nor even to clear up the metaphysics of salvation; not to help a side in controversy about some possible pre-Adamite man; but simply and solely to reveal the one thing needful that affects this race of Adam, and to expand the God-given announcement: "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." As Galileo said: "It teaches

how we may reach heaven, not how heaven moves." The only knowledge it is given for is that of which the Saviour speaks in His high-priestly prayer: "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Its one design is summed up in the appeal of Paul to the young pastor at Ephesus: "From a babe hast thou known the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God," that is, every scripture in the sacred writings now in question, "is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

If, besides a revelation for this one object, a revelation of things pertaining to science had been desirable, how would it have been possible? The world in its infancy was not prepared for these things, and a revelation with regard to them would not have been understood. Better to raise up men from time to time who should

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strike out great discoveries, and show their practical applications as they were wanted ; better for the human intellect that it should be exercised and developed in this way ; better that the knowledge of such subjects should be brought upon the stage when it should fit into the existing facts of life, when society should be ripe to receive and ready to appreciate them. If, in a Divine book, with the one great object of the Bible, we find incidental reference, either in the way of history, or for the purpose of illustration, to the facts of the material world, we should expect to find such reference made, not in the language of technical science, but in the language of poetry, or in the common language of life ; and this we find to be the case.

Our thoughts have now travelled up to this point—you are now at a stage in which you may look at the alternative consequences, if, instead of such a Bible as ours, we had one answering to your ideal ; one in which the facts of natural history were noticed, not in common language, but in the language of ultimate discovery ; and one that would anticipate and clear up the



difficulties of scholars and scientists in all ages. How would such a Bible answer the great purpose of making men "wise unto salvation?" What a colossal, bewildering book it would be! what a learned book! what a costly one! The book meant for all men, and needed alike by all men, would be so written that it would be of use only to comparatively few; with most people, there would be lack of money to purchase, or of time to read, or of culture to understand it, and many of those who had this money, time, or culture, would find their attention drawn away from the great subjects it was given to reveal, to the smaller subjects with which their earthly natures felt more sympathy.

(3.) *You tell me, perhaps, that your mind is disturbed by the idea, so mysteriously little and low, as that of God writing a book! and that reverence, no less than reason, compels you to discard it.* Yet, beyond a question, words, not mere things; words, not mere works, are the best instruments for unveiling the knowledge of thoughts, of reasons, of laws, of facts belonging to the spiritual world; beyond a question it is knowledge of this

kind that our souls are dying to have ; beyond a question it is such knowledge that God is aiming to give. In this case, therefore, and with your views, you are shut up to the confounding belief, that the best and wisest Being has not found out what even you know to be the best and wisest way of giving us the revelation wanted ; and, if you have a message from God at all, rejecting the medium of language, you have no alternative but to have it through some inferior vehicle.

(4.) *Perhaps, while believing, in a general way, in the Bible as being the book of God, you do not believe that its statements are definite and final.* This kind of belief is, I think, only a fatal form of unbelief. Just consider. You object to its interpretation on the principle expressed in the popular phrase, "the plain meaning of words." You think its use is to be found, not so much in its language as in its spirit ; and that you may find out what that spirit is, not so much from what is written, as from the Christian exercise of your own independent thought. It seems to me that if

you have this unbelief in the exactness and precision of the instructions given in the Bible, the practical alternative is, at least, one that includes a certain remarkable inconsistency—for what makes the scholar? Exactness; and is exactness of less value in the holy scholarship of the soul than it is in inferior things? What makes the value of man's word? Exactness; and is this of less value in God's word? What, above all things, is essential in natural science? Exactness; and is this of less value in the science of eternal life? The value of a likeness, the value of a diagram, the value of a report, the value of a railway guide, must altogether depend upon exactness; and does this exactness cease to be of value in the sphere of Divine revelation? Truth seen through a fog ought to be the last thing that a scientific age should desire; it is the last thing that we wish for even in the comparatively trivial things of common life. An indefinite banking account, an indefinite medical prescription, an indefinite investment of the small capital we have to live on, will never be thought satisfactory; and

in many departments of responsibility exactitude is only another name for rectitude. Can we really think Luke less definite than Livy? John than Plato? Paul than Demosthenes? and at the same time hold that these scribes of revelation wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost? In no department of human knowledge do we think of mist as a merit; and shall we think ourselves advanced in Christian thought if we think that this book, given on purpose to be the standard of our faith and the directory of our practice in our highest life, is not intended to convey to us exact and precise information on the momentous things in question?

There is no escape from this alternative and its connections. In certain parts of his travels, Dr. Livingstone found that his guides were so ignorant, or so determined to deceive, that he could do better without than with them, and so constantly referred to his compass. What would he have done if, by some accident, that compass itself had become untrustworthy? In this wilderness of our pilgrimage, amidst marsh

lights, illusive shows, treacherous guides and false Christs, what shall we do, and to what shall we trust, if we suspect vagueness and uncertainty in the statements of that book which has been given to us on purpose to be as a "sure word of prophecy?"

(5.) *You may say that your reason, against your will, compels you to reject the Bible, because you are unable to believe in a miracle.* Like the old Roman, who said of a certain rumour: "I would not believe that story though Cato himself related it." So, whatever the greatness of the name, whatever the splendour of the evidence that supports the story of a miracle, you feel unable to believe it. But what do you understand by the word miracle? If you mean that you are unable to believe in a natural impossibility, or a geometrical absurdity, or a self-contradiction; or that there can be in nature anything contrary to the laws of nature—I share your sense of inability. If, for instance, you mean that you could not believe the story of a man who should say: "At last I have succeeded in drawing a circle round infinite

space ; or, I have taken four pebbles out of three ; or, I can construct a triangle out of two straight lines"—most reasonable people would be inclined to sympathise with your difficulty ; but not one of these things is an instance of what we mean by a miracle.

A miracle is a wonder in nature which transcends, but which by no means necessarily supersedes, the ordinary laws of nature. "Miracles," says Dr. Geikie, "are only the momentary intercalation of unsuspected laws, which startle us by their novelty, but are no more miraculous," that is, wonderful, "than the most common incident in the great mystery of nature." The distinction of a miracle is not simply that it is wonderful, but that it is startling. Nothing is more wonderful than the ordinary course of nature ; but when that course is arrested we are startled, and, at the same time, compelled to own that only God could have done this. It is only an exercise in a new way of the Almighty Power which we see daily at work around us, to wake up man's attention to some new message that He is

giving, and, at the same time, to put His own royal seal on that message. Paul has asked: "Why should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead?" On the same principle we ask, —Why should it be thought incredible that the Author of nature should, on some great occasion, and for some special purpose, interrupt for a moment the ordinary course of nature?

No doubt we have in the Bible the record of many miracles, and that its inspiration, as also the things it was given to reveal—such as the incarnation of the Word and the working of the Holy Spirit,—come under the name of the miraculous; but accept the Bible or reject it, there is no alternative but to believe in a miracle. Accept it, and you accept a manifold miracle; reject it, and certain facts are left which, without a manifold miracle, cannot be accounted for. It is a great literary miracle; it is a wonder beyond the working of ordinary laws. It is a fact that it is the record of a story that took one thousand four hundred years in the process of telling. It is a fact that through all

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these years it was one progressive revelation. It is a fact that the New Testament is the lineal offshoot from the Old. It is a fact that this book, from the time when it was finished, eighteen hundred years ago, has been sharply tested, both by the attacks of its foes, and by the sins of its friends, and that it has held its own all the time, so that never did its thoughts so penetrate the thinking of mankind, and never was its power so wonderful as now. Here is a testimony to this, which is all the more impressive as coming from the pen of an eloquent writer who doubts its proper Divine inspiration :—

“This collection of books has taken such a hold on the world as no other. The literature of Greece, which goes up like incense from that land of temples and heroic deeds, has not half the influence of this book from a nation alike despised in ancient and modern times. It is read on each Sabbath in all the ten thousand pulpits of our land; in all the temples of Christendom is its voice lifted up week by week; the sun never sets on its gleaming page; it goes equally to the



cottage of the plain man and the palace of the king. It goes into the literature of the scholar, and colours the talk of the street. The bark of the merchant cannot sail the sea without it; no ship of war goes to the conflict but the Bible is there. It enters men's closets, and mingles in all the grief and cheerfulness of life. The affianced maiden prays to God in Scripture for strength in her new duties; men are married by Scripture. The Bible attends them in their sickness; when the fever of the world is on them, the aching head finds a softer pillow when the Bible lies underneath. The mariner, escaping from shipwreck, clutches this first of his treasures, and keeps it sacred to God. It goes with the pedlar in the crowded pack, cheers him at eventide when he sits down dusty and fatigued, and brightens the freshness of his morning face. It blesses us when we are born; gives names to half Christendom; rejoices with us; has sympathy for our mourning; tempers our grief to final issues. It is the better part of our sermons, it lifts man above himself. Our best of uttered prayers are in its storied

speech, wherewith our fathers and the patriarchs prayed. The timid man, about awaking from this dream of life, looks through the glass of Scripture, and his eye grows bright; he does not fear to stand alone, to tread the unknown distant, to take the death angel by the hand, and bid farewell to wife, and babes, and home. Men rest on this their fears and hopes, it tells them of God, and of His Blessed Son; of earthly duties, and of heavenly rest. . . . Now, for such effects there must be an adequate cause. That nothing comes of nothing is true all the world over. It is no light thing to hold with an electric chain a thousand hearts, though but an hour, beating and bounding with such fiery speed. What is it, then, to hold the whole Christian world, and that for centuries? Are men fed with chaff and husks? The authors we reckon great, whose word is in the newspapers and the market-place, whose articulate breath now sways a nation's mind, will soon pass away, giving place to other great men of a season; who, in their turn, shall follow them to eminence, and then oblivion.

Some thousand famous writers come up in this century, to be forgotten in the next; but the silver cord of the Bible is not loosed nor its golden bowl broken as time chronicles its tens of centuries passed by. Has the human race gone mad? Time sits as a refiner of metal; the dross is piled into forgotten heaps, but the pure gold is reserved for use, passes into the ages, and is current a thousand years hence as well as to-day. It is only real merit that can long pass; tinsel will rust in the storms of life—false weights are soon detected there. It is only a heart that can speak deep and true to a heart, a mind to a mind, a soul to a soul, wisdom to the wise, and religion to the pious. There must, then, be in the Bible a mind, a heart, soul, wisdom, and religion. Were it otherwise, how could millions find it their lawgiver, friend, and prophet? Some of the greatest human institutions seem built on the Bible; such things will not stand on heaps of chaff, but on mountains of rock. What is the secret cause of this wide, deep influence? It must be found in the Bible itself, and must be adequate to the effects."

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I can account for this if the Bible be true; I cannot account for it if it be false. In the one case, all this would be of course; in the other, it would be a long, intricate and unreasonable miracle; and if you cannot accept the story of the miracle, what do you say to the miracle of the story?



## CHAPTER V.

### THE GOSPEL.

IV. Go a step further, and think of the alternatives of faith and unbelief in "the glad tidings" of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Unbelief swears that there is no truth whatever in the report. What then? To say that the *Gospel* which the Bible contains is not true, may seem to be only another way of saying that the *Bible* is not true; but it is not only this. This new division of our argument opens a new subject, which requires distinct consideration. Many persons, whose minds have not been much occupied with questions relating to the inspiration and authenticity of the Bible, have much intellectual difficulty in accepting the doctrines constituting the Gospel—such as the doctrine of pardon in connection with the Gospel scheme; the doctrine of prayer; the doctrine of Divine sympathy with

human sorrow; the doctrine of the future life. If there had been no Bible, and if somehow these doctrines had first been uttered by some miraculous voice, and then had reached us by tradition—if, to use Hooker's language, God had written them with no pen but the human tongue, and in no books but human ears—these doctrines would have roused opposition or have been rejected with unbelief. Should you reject them, what will follow?

(1.) *What would be the alternative to sinners?* Hear the angels' sermon: "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. . . . Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." Think of the condensation of the Gospel given by the apostle: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Say that all this is untrue, what then? Whatever I do *not* know, this I *do* know, that I am a sinner. What must I do? Another man, perhaps, may think this

a paltry and egotistic matter, unworthy my attention. I do not see this. However, let me try for the present to forget myself, and only to think of others. What will they do? What will the world do? There is nothing more sure than law. When law is broken, there is nothing more inevitable than penalty. There is nothing more patent than the fact that all men have broken the law, and are liable to the penalty. The Gospel has told me that, guilty as we are, the infinite heart is still bent on blessing us; that God, in giving His Son to us, has given Himself; that, if we are willing to be saved, He is willing to save us, and in a way that will at once lift lost humanity and honour irrevocable law. Is this untrue? And did not Jesus come after all? Or must we say yes, He did indeed come, intending to save us, and He tried, good man, but failed! I look round for some alternative method of salvation, but all the cries of my consciousness within, and all the reports brought by my exploring faculties from without, confirm the truth of such words as these: "For other foundation can no man lay than that

is laid, which is Christ Jesus." "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved."

I am not now undertaking to prove that the Christian Gospel is true; but I do say, that if not, there is no other; and that, if there is no salvation in Christ, there is no such thing as salvation. Shipwrecked man on the rock, there! Black death is coming up, deep calls to deep; the ice-cold water that is rising will soon cover your lips, and close over your head! Look! There is a boat, leap into it! What are you saying—you do not believe in the boat? Now make haste. The question is not this of many, nor this of two, but this or none!

(2.) *What is our alternative if we have read with conviction the notice posted up by unbelief: "No more prayer!"* A large part of the Sacred Book is taken up with disclosures of the Divine will concerning prayer. We have the law of prayer given in many forms and with many varieties of enforcement; many of the Psalms are prayers, many passages in the prophetic scriptures, and many vivid statements in the New



Testament inform us of the arrangements made in the Court of Heaven for the lawful, righteous and acceptable presentation of prayer; promises are given to encourage us in its exercise, and, also, many examples of its efficacy. Christ Himself has spoken cheering words on prayer, so plain that not even a child could misunderstand them, not the most nervous weakling fear that they are susceptible of a double meaning, or that they hold a doctrine of reserve. He has said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you . . . Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." After His ascension, the fire of His inspiration burnt in sentences like these: "In Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; let us therefore come boldly unto the

throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." All this have we been taught in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Although we never could have found out with any certainty for ourselves, that God hears prayer, we were not surprised to be told it; for already we knew the cry of weakness to strength to be one of the most potent of natural forces; even the bird hears the plaint of her nestling, and the sheep the bleat of her lamb; was it likely, therefore, that the Father in heaven would be deaf to the prayer of His children? Does only our own fancy tell us that Christ has made a pathway by which those who need mercy may reach a mercy-seat? When, from a furnace of prayer within me, I speak to God, will He not hear? When a great pain cries out to Him, is it of no use? Then why, when making me, did He plant within me this praying instinct? Why was my nature made to be contradicted? And who can hold back the cry—"God, I never should have expected this of *You!*"

(3.) *What is our alternative as sufferers?*

A man may doubt the existence of God, he may doubt the existence of a world beyond this ; he may doubt the existence of penalty following sin ; but he will never be able to doubt the existence of sorrow ; and sometimes, perhaps, he will so cower in its shadow, or quiver in its grasp, that it may seem impossible to live another day without some antidote, or at least some palliative. Just at such times, that is, just when he suffers most, and, therefore, most needs sympathy, he will oftenmost feel his own unworthiness, be most sensitive of his own insignificance, and least able to take comfort from the assurance that the great God really cares for him. Anyone who has a turn for science is peculiarly liable to feel this despondency, and, indeed, almost everyone is tempted to feel it, and most especially in moods when his life wakes up to feel his own nothingness in comparison with the rousing magnificence of the material creation. I confess to have suffered from doubts thus generated. Richard Baxter, in his preface to a book written to help those "who suffer from Satan's assaults on their faith," says: "It is a subject which I

have found both useful and necessary to myself, and I have reason enough to think that many others may be as weak as I, and would fain have those partake of my satisfaction that have partaken of my difficulties." It is in a similar spirit that I am speaking now. When, wakeful with trouble, I stand in thought, or, in reality, on the tower of the astronomer, in the hush of night, and look into all the "dread magnificence of heaven," filling, as it does, the infinite depth of distance, above, below, and all round me; when I think of the mighty millions of rolling worlds in the midst of which this tiny world seems to be hung upon nothing; when overpowering ideas of size, weight, swiftness, irresistible momentum and awful order, seem about to crush me; when I look up and down, this way and that way, into dread abysses of space; when a voice near me says: "We are now traversing a distance, beside which the immense line stretching from the earth to the sun is but an invisible point"—for a moment, perhaps, my troubles may seem to be reduced amazingly; but so are my hopes of a panacea. Speaking of two star-gazers,

a forcible writer says, "The interest of their sidereal observations led them on till the knowledge that scarce any other human vision was travelling within a hundred millions of miles of their own, gave them such a sense of the isolation of that faculty as almost to be a sense of isolation in respect of their own personality, causing a shudder at its absoluteness. At night, when human discords and harmonies are hushed, in a general sense, for the greater part of twelve hours, there is nothing to moderate the blow with which the infinitely great—the stellar universe—strikes down upon the infinitely little—the mind of the beholder—and this was the case now. Having got closer to immensity than their fellow creatures, they saw at once its beauty and its frightfulness. They more and more felt the contrast between their own tiny magnitudes and those among whom they had recklessly plunged, till they were oppressed with the presence of a vastness they could not cope with even as an idea, and which hung about them like a nightmare." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy.

Left to myself, without the Bible at such time, and before such a scene, recollecting that what I see is but a speck in comparison with the infinity beyond, and feeling that I am a being whose sphere of vision is only a speck, and whose experience is only a second, I should find myself repeating, half in worship, but I fear half in unbelief, the old Psalm: "When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained: Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" It would be inconceivable as I looked into the scintillating vault of night, that the Maker of all the stars should be my very own Father, should have for me a father's love, and be ready at this moment to comfort me as a father would his child. Then I open the book of "glad tidings," and read: "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power, not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O

Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." Then I turn over the leaves, and read what once fell from the lips of Jesus, and is set down in the sixth chapter of Matthew, and the twelfth of Luke, for the solace of His weary suffering disciples while the world stands.

These are the alternatives of faith: what are those of unbelief? One is this: by such unbelief you go back to practical unbelief in the existence of God. Just consider; when you think of the sublime universe, and then at your own little self, you say—How can God be sorry for me? Man, on his way to work, steps on an insect in the road, without seeing, or knowing, or caring, or being able to help it; God does the same—how can I think it possible for God to notice the flutters and pangs of

human animalculæ? Thus you are open to the charge made of old: "Thou thoughtest the Almighty to be altogether such an one as thyself"; and this is virtually to give up faith in Him. Besides, when you are thinking only of created natures, do you think that great souls, because they are great, can only attend to great sizes, great spaces, great values, great sum-totals and generalizations? Are not great things mastered by the mastery of little things, and is it not in this way that even human greatness most verifies itself? What is God? Is it not the name of the Being who alone is infinitely perfect, who can see all things without distraction, and do all things without exhaustion? You think of the greatest as one who can only do what is great. There must be infinitely more small things in the universe than great things; but you think of Him as unable to notice these small things; then, what He can do is not to be compared with what He cannot do; the same thing may be said of you. In speaking of God as being too great for sympathy with sufferers so low in the scale of being, and so slight in importance as we are,



although you may suppose that you laud and magnify His perfections—as far as your own faith is concerned—you do but compliment Him out of existence.

Another consequence of this unbelief is, that by it you deprive yourself of all effectual support amidst the manifold ills of life. In some of these, certainly, only God can help us; but, according to your own sad creed—when we are old, when we are down in the world, when “the five gateways of life” are fast closing, when all the glory of our home has melted into a grave, when, along with that, care grinds the very heart out of us, when our life is behind us, and our canoe is just shooting the last rapids—it is not true, as we have been told in the Gospel, that, although all things are against us, God is for us; that God in Christ stoops down to us in the great might of His pity, brings bright things to our remembrance by the life of His Spirit, turns our troubles into tonics, makes our very defeats work within us the victories of heaven, and glorifies us even in our agony point! What must we do? “Choke back your cries,” says our

new oracle; "gnash your teeth and bear it. We know that there is no Gospel for mourners; but the world is no worse off than it was before, and we still have the grand old religion of the classics." True; but that religion—in other words, that intense life of the soul by which, in Greece, the dream of the gods was woven—hints at no Divine sympathy with man in the hour of darkness, and that is all I want just now. According to it, the highest feminine revelation of the Divine, therefore of the sympathetic, might have been expected in "heavenly Diana, daughter of Jove"; but in one of the dramas of Euripides my memory finds a passage in which she is represented as saying to the dying Hippolytus: "But now, farewell; for it is not lawful for me to behold the perished, nor to defile mine eyes with 'looking on' the gasps of the expiring."<sup>1</sup> In its highest conceptions of Divinity, the world, inventing its own religion at a time when its own

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Καὶ χαῖρ' ἔμοι γὰρ οὐ θέμις φθιτοῦς ὄραϊν,  
οὐδ' ὄμμα χραίνειν θανασίμοισιν ἐκπνοαῖς·  
Ὅρῳ δέ σ' ἤδη τοῦδε πλησίον κακοῦ.

<sup>1</sup> *Hippolytus.*

wisdom was most deep and delicate, never thought it possible that there could be Divine sympathy with human sorrow. You are not wiser than the world was then, and, without the Gospel, you are without a comforter when one is most wanted.

(4.) *What is our alternative when we give up the doctrine of the future life as brought to light by the Gospel?* That there is a life beyond the grave was shadowed forth in the liturgies of Egypt, hinted at in the writings of philosophers, and the expectation of it is wrought into the very texture of our nature. "Why has God put this desire within us?" asks Robert Robinson. "No sparrow sighs for a palace, or has a mind too big for his nest." "Wherever we find a wing, we find air to match it; a fin, water to match it; an eye, light to match it; an ear, sound to match it; perception of the beautiful, beauty to match it; reasoning power, cause and effect to match it"; and so, perhaps, it might be argued, as the expectation of a future life is natural to man, there will be a future life to match it—the existence of such an expectation is a prophecy of its fulfilment.

Yes; but the future life was thought of with many a misgiving and many a terror until Christ came, giving us a right to say: "He hath abolished death, and hath brought light and immortality to light by the Gospel."

Unbelief will sometimes resent this doctrine as if it wrought an injury. Winwood Reade, when the hand of death was on him, wrote thus: "The doctrine of a personal Creator I reject as impossible; the immortality of the soul, on the other hand, I hold as improbable, though not as demonstratively false. I have attained the perfection of unselfishness as regards the disposition of my soul. I have no desire whatever to begin a new state of existence; it is, I think, just and natural that I should go back to the earth whence I came."

It is, I hope, very unlikely that anyone who has now read the words of this dismal creed is eager to adopt it; at the same time I fear that everyone to whom I now appeal is not quite settled in a happy faith. I almost hear someone whisper to this effect—"Although I do hold the doctrine of a future life, I certainly do not hold it

according to the Christian theory." That is, if I understand you, you hold it as a conjecture, not as a certainty; hold it as Cicero might have done, or as a student of pure science may do—speculatively—and not as having for it the warrant of any positive declaration. Then, in the moment when death is beginning to hold the brain in his grasp, and to touch the heart with his sting, instead of the conviction that you are passing through the brief darkness of death into the light of unpicturable bliss, you can have nothing to say with more certainty than this: "It will soon be over—what then? Will my spirit go out like a flame? Will this fevered pulse soon throb itself away into everlasting stillness? Am I now sinking back into the blank of nonentity? Who knows?" As you look forward, you will only look into the "sunless gulfs of doubt," and only be able to say "yes" to the old strain—

"Distrust and darkness of a future state,  
Is that which makes mankind to dread their fate;  
Dying is nothing, but 'tis this we fear:  
To be we know not what, we know not where."

For such an alternative I would not, if I were you, part with faith in the stately

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proclamation, so often whispered in our sorrows, and sounded over our graves : "I am the resurrection and the life ; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

There are honest doubters, no doubt. But the thing that confounds me is, that any "honest doubter," who is at the same time a kind, honest brother, should make merry, as many doubters do, with the "superstition" of those who believe. We know, indeed, that, whatever the pain to our own feelings, it is a right thing to pulverize an idol and explode a lie ; but what can there be in this happy dream of immortality, if it be only a dream, to make the doubter scorn it ? Why should this, of all things, rouse every bristle in his nature, and sting him into contemptuous antagonism ? How can he go to the poor, the friendless, and the dying—ridicule their foolish worship and their fatuous faith, tell them, with flippant language and a smiling countenance, that the Gospel of Eternal Life is a forgery, and, instead of it, preach "The incognoscibility of the infinite," and

the death of the soul with the death of the body? I think that any true man would rather be in his grave than go to such sufferers with such a message, and that—if go he must—"I am sent to thee with heavy tidings," must in some form or other be the preface to it—that he will stand up to utter it with wet, white face, with quivering lip and breaking heart; and that, should he have to print it, he will border the paragraph with broad black lines.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RIGHT END OF MAN'S EXISTENCE.

V. Apply our present question to what is set forth in the Christian system as to the right end of man's existence. There is no doubt about the end for which a watch is made, or a typewriter, or a steam-engine, or any other work of man; but, strange to say, about the end for which man himself is made there is a controversy. A perfect epitome of what the New Testament teaches is given in the well-known formula—"Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." Unbelief says—"The chief end of man is not to glorify God"; and one of the most popular forms and striking statements of this unbelief we find in certain words, supposed to represent the views of an evangelical doctrinist, and which run thus:—"His theory is that actions are good or evil as they are prompted or not prompted by an exclusive reference to the glory of



God. God is a Being, in His conceptions, who has no pleasure in the exercise of love and truthfulness and justice, considered as affecting the well-being of His creatures. He has satisfaction in us only in so far as we exhaust our motives and dispositions of all relations to our fellow beings, and replace sympathy with men with anxiety for the glory of God. The deed of Grace Darling, when she took a boat in the storm to rescue drowning men and women, was not good, if it was only compassion that nerved her to brave death for the chance of saving others; it was only good if she asked herself—Will this redound to the glory of God? The man who endures tortures rather than betray a trust—the man who spends years in toil, in order to discharge an obligation from which the law declares him free—must be animated, not by the spirit of fidelity to his fellow-man, but by a desire to make the name of God more known. The sweet charities of domestic life, the ready hand and soothing word in sickness, the forbearance towards frailties, the prompt helpfulness in all efforts, and sympathy in all joys, are simply evil, if they result from any

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constitutional tendency, or from dispositions disciplined by the operation of suffering and the perception of moral loveliness. A wife is not to devote herself to her husband out of love to him, and a sense of the duties imposed by a close relation, she is to be a faithful wife for the glory of God; if she feels her natural affections welling up too strongly, she is to repress them; it will not do to act from natural affection, she must think of the glory of God. A man is to guide his affairs with energy and discretion—not from an honest desire to fulfil his responsibilities as a husband and a father—but that God's praise may be sung. A Christian is to pay his debts to the glory of God; were it not for the coercion of this supreme motive, it would be an evil thing to pay them. A man is not to be just from a feeling of justice; he is not to help his fellow-man out of good-will to his fellow-man; he is not to be a tender husband and father out of affection; all these natural muscles and fibres are to be torn away, and replaced by a patent steel-spun anxiety for the glory of God.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Eliot.

Not a few who rejoice in this keen critique, and who accept as true this sparkling travesty, think that there is no more to be said on the subject of living to the glory of God. But nothing whatever has been said on the doctrine of the Bible about it; only a little sport has been made with certain narrow notions and rhetorical flowers, for which the Bible is not responsible. What is the glory of God? The word means two distinct but related things—it means, first, the display, more or less, of that one beautiful perfection, the different rays of which we call by such different names, as power, wisdom and goodness; it means, next, the honour due to God for the perfection thus displayed. When you watch the discoveries of natural science, the perfection that you see unfolding is not the glory of a creation without a Creator, nor the glory of laws that made themselves, but the glory of God, to whom, therefore, for all this glory of perfection, is due all the glory of the praise. When the first meeting of the British Association was held, a coin was examined whose inscription could not be deciphered

until heat was applied, then out came the words "Deo Gloria." "Thus," said Lord Carlisle, "when the torch of science is faithfully applied to dark things, 'Deo Gloria' is always the result it brings."

If, as far as the material creation is concerned, you think this doctrine unreasonable, I might ask you for some preferable alternative; but, for the present, there is no time for this, and I have only thus spoken about the creation in general in order to make plainer an application of the doctrine to man. What follower of Christ would say, as the reviewer assumes that we all would say, that a man ought not to be just, or kind, or heroic in his family, or commercial or civic relationships, before he is a conscious Christian? Who amongst us thinks that the excellencies of which the reviewer speaks are to be frowned upon until the person in whose conduct they appear is moved by the Christian principle of action—"Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God?" There is no truth in this implication.

At the same time we assert that God is

the author of nature in man, no less than of nature in the universe around him. We ask who should have the honour due to a work, if not the author of it? We believe that the excellencies now under notice, when they grow and bloom in man's nature apart from Christianity, are as truly wrought by God as are the Christian graces of the Holy Ghost; that the force which unfolds in a beautiful character is as much from the Creator as that which unfolds in a beautiful flower. That the one as certainly as the other declares His glory in the sense of revelation, and that for both there is due to Him glory in the sense of praise. The Gospel, as we understand the case, has been given to us in order that we, by union with the Son of God, might receive the influences of the Holy Spirit, so that we may reveal His glory, not only for this short stage of our pilgrimage, and in that small section of our life which is related to our fellow mortals, but also in that higher life through which we are to have for ever a growing glory of fellowship with God. We are to trust Him, obey Him, and make Him known, that we may see, reflect and diffuse

His glory. The more this is the case the better for humanity. The more of God there is in man the more there will be of truth, the more of love, the more of patience, the more of nobility, the more of holy spiritual fire; at the same time, this pride, the blighting curse of everything good that it touches, will gradually be crushed out of existence by the gradual ascendancy of the principle which recognises in all goodness the revelation of God's own nature, and which will delight in this chorus of redeemed spirits—"Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to Thy name be the glory."

Do you still maintain your unbelief in this? Then, at least, you will propose something better as a substitute. What do you say is the chief end of man? "Utility." The same thing may be said of a cart-horse. "Self?" That, if prevalent, would break up society. "The satisfaction of conscience?" Of whose conscience? And who is to be the judge? "Public sentiment?" In what community, and in what age? "Gain?" We know many influential members of society who evidently think so, whose very first notion is to make money,

who count this to be their "calling," and who actually contrive to associate some feeling of duty with the notion of leaving behind them a fortune for their family. But what if there should come from the heart of the universe a voice, crying: "What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own life, or what shall he give in exchange for his life?" Shall anything in this earthly life be chosen for our "chief end?" "We can easily conceive," says one, whose thoughts rather than precise words now come to my memory, "how sad it would be, in the lower orders of creation, if a creature of higher power and longer life should be decreed to mate with and hang upon one of much inferior nature and of shorter date than itself. If, for instance, the aloe, the plant of centuries, were fated to be the appendage and parasite of the ephemeron, the insect of a day, it would be doomed to early and lonely widowhood by the untimely decay of its idol and the perfect inadequacy of its appointed prop. The soul, with its unrenounceable immortality and its infinite aspirations, is such a plant of the long

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centuries, an aloe of the eternities beyond this world." Did God permit man to accept as his chief end anything finite, mortal and imperfect, this would be sentencing man to illimitable misery.





## CHAPTER VII.

### UNBELIEF STRENGTHENED BY THE INCONSISTENCY OF PROFESSED CHRISTIANS.

VI. By this time, let us hope, some who have hesitated before, are inclined to take the side of faith; but others are still inclined to unbelief, owing to the prejudice wrought in their minds by the wrong lives of some certificated Christians. A Christian whose religion has an artificial look, as if it were only a religion of respectable appearances, or of obedience to the legislation of decorum; a Christian whose Christian talk is mainly talk about church or chapel politics; a Christian who, in his Christian work, suffers from a weak desire to say something new, or from an aching strain to do something conspicuous, whose very self may be said, as in the case of Rousseau, to be "a disease," who is unwilling to do that which is subordinate, unable to do that which is supreme, and who therefore does nothing; a Christian who is not quite alive enough to be of any use, yet not

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quite dead enough to bury; a Christian who has frank readiness of sympathy with any man who honourably or dishonourably gets on in the world, but no readiness of sympathy with any man or anything that has no success; a Christian who is fond of money, or fond of scandal, or fond of ease; a Christian who will not take trouble to make the most telling protest possible against any of the great social sins which make this time of ours so critical; a Christian in trade who takes unfair advantage of a sinner—such a Christian does more harm to Christianity, and spreads more doubts of its truth, than Strauss, or Renan, or Hegel ever did. When a man in rags offers to sell you a secret sure to make your fortune—when a man recommends a sovereign cure for that malady of which he himself is dying—it is not altogether from irrational prejudice that you slight such recommendations. Say what we please, men will judge a farmer by his farm, a teacher by his pupils, a doctor by what he does for his patients; and, on the same principle, Christ Himself by Christians. All this must be admitted,—at the same time you must admit that those who

take the side of unbelief in Christianity, on the charge of inconsistency in Christians, come under certain new responsibilities that belong to their new position; for instance, if you take this position, at least one inevitable alternative is, that you commit yourself to a course of egregious unfairness. The following criticism on unfair critics of books will apply to unfair critics of character: "What would the old Israelites have said to their spies if, instead of bringing back the grapes of Eschol, they had returned with specimens of centipedes of the wilderness of Marsaba, the tail of a panther from Ajalon, and some apples of Sodom from the Dead Sea shore? This is, after all, the sort of report that many a reviewer gives of the book he undertakes to examine. He finds the centipede, the panther, and the fruit of ashes. They are really in the work; but to discover them he passes by many a vineyard, and oliveyard, and corn-field, and flowery plain, and gives in effect, though not in literal words, an absolutely false impression of what may be after all 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'" <sup>1</sup> I charge you with an unfair

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Power Cobb e.

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animus and an untrue report, answering to that which is thus denounced; you review "the living epistles of Christ" just as some writers do books; you carefully take out the exceptional part of a character, and hold it up as a specimen of the whole; you blame the many for the conduct of the few, and, on the false charge that Christians are evil, you found your unbelief in the religion they profess. More than this—by this argument against Christianity founded on the faults of some who profess it—you commit yourselves to a glaring inconsistency. For, of course you are bound to apply to everything in life the rule by which you judge the Christian revelation; and it is certain that you are not in the habit of so applying it. To be consistent, you must have nothing to do with law, because you know certain lawyers who are not to be trusted; nothing to do with medicine, because you know certain medical men who are not scientific; nothing to do with books, for many books are worthless; nothing to do with commerce, for there are bankrupts; nothing to do with society, for this is a wicked world.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PRACTICAL HINTS.

VII. Accept the hints now following, on the best way to become settled in the right faith, and so to reach the happiest alternatives.

(1.) *We should make it the first business in life to find out with certainty that supreme truth which the Bible professes to reveal.* Wisely did the Greeks call a religious man "a man of business." Wisely do our modern men say "business first." Wisely shall we act if we apply this rule to the great business of religion. We are forced to fear, however, that although we call this common sense, it is not common custom. There is much shallow Christianity, there is also much shallow anti-Christianity in the world ; many professors of unbelief, like many professors of faith, do but reflect the notions and repeat the phrases of other people ; and wisdom, without any labour

of their own, is pumped into their minds, out of the Quarterlies, as into empty buckets. In this day of high pressure, when almost every man is in a hurry, almost every man is, in some sense, a specialist; almost all his mental power is used up in some one department, and what he knows outside that—what he knows of current thoughts, facts, and interests—what he knows about the modern battle of principles and interpretations, such as those we are dealing with now—he knows for the most part by skimming the papers, or by impressions taken from magazine articles, easily written and easily read. So, voluble people who have no depth, and flippant people who have no knees, “become scientific in an hour, sceptical for a shilling,” and catch the trick of advanced thought without the trouble of it. No knowledge worth having comes by passive reciprocity; the great problems of conscience and faith are not to be settled with gaiety or playfulness of heart, or by the effect of mere mental atmosphere, or while we are thinking of something else; and I say that we are bound to fling into this tremendous

business all our strength of body, mind and soul.

(2.) *Every manly doubter, God helping him, should try to find out, by his own hard and thorough work, what the Bible teaches about religion before he consults any other teachers.* A man will often write a book on this theme as a man might have written one four hundred years before Christianity. Such a writer seems to think that he is the first inquirer, that he has all to see with his own mortal optics, and all to think out for himself. He insists on not seeming to know that such a book as the Bible is in existence; he never refers to a Divine revelation, except by the way, and in such cool and serene words as these: "I am aware that the evidence for miracles is logically and historically untrustworthy." Leaving the Bible out of the question, he tries by the downright hard work of his own brain to find out God. Many such hard workers explore the mysteries of space, search into matter, think about thought, read the histories of language, ponder the earliest memorials of dim, dumb time, look into their own souls, and speak from their own

inflatus. But although they may, in the rack of work like this, wrench all their powers to agony-point, and strain all their mental sinews to the uttermost, if it be true that the Bible is the last revelation given by God to man, then, until they open that—

“All thinking is a waste of thought,  
And nought is everything, and everything is nought.”

(3.) *There should be concern to use right methods of work.* If I might speak to beginners, I would say, begin by working to get your convictions *about* the Bible *from* the Bible, not from the commentaries of friends or foes. Begin to work, not on the Mosaic story of creation, not on critical difficulties, not on the future life, nor in any mere marginalia, but begin at the centre, and work in the spirit that made the intense Archimedes say to the mad besiegers, as they burst helter-skelter into his room: “*Noli turbare circulos meos!*”—“Do not disturb my circles!” Do not ask that all difficulties may be cleared before you consent to believe; do not ask for more evidence than is reasonable or necessary; do not ask for evidence of a kind that the case does not require; for instance,



do not ask that, before you believe, you may have the same kind of feeling that you have when you have gone through a proposition of Euclid, and are satisfied with the result. You are on the wrong scent if you demand *mathematical* proof while you have already *probable* evidence—evidence that satisfies the faith of a rational man in all matters which, like this, belong to life and history. As the German says, “Honour truth by use,” I say honour *faith* by use. When you have a little faith, use up energetically that little—use it up as soon as you have it, and as far as you have it. Along with all, and above all your other tryings, try the power of prayer, for if this book be true, it is only by the Holy Ghost, promised in answer to prayer, that we can have that sympathetic life which can understand the meanings of Divine truth.

(4.) *There must be work for the right end.* Faith, in the sense of believing that the book is true, will be of no essential use unless it shall lead us on to faith in the sense of trust in the Saviour whom the book reveals. The highest exercise and most convincing demonstration of reason will

only carry you to a certain point, which is still short of salvation, and will only bring you to the edge of that great resolve in which you give yourself to Christ. The Divine value of the Christian's faith, as it has been well said, "lies more in its *will*-element than in its *reason*-element; more in its moral factor than its rational." While your reason is still sorely perplexed you may say: "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief!" This faith in Christ is felt by many to be a great mystery. De Quincey, when a young man at Oxford, said to his good mother, who was a Christian in Mr. Romaine's circle: "Mother, what is this business that you call faith?" She tried to explain it, making it out to be a very simple thing. "Yes, yes," he said; "but how do you *do* it?" If you ask me this question, I will simply say—Turn the question into a prayer, send it up to God, and, while you pray, try to do what you pray for power to do. Try—and I think that, before long, a moment will come when you will know that you touch God. Put out the whole force of your existence, and try, like Jacob, to wrestle with the unknown mystery. With

the intense reality of the soul dealing at first hand with the intense reality of God, try to make the great venture, and you may be sure that while you thus try the mighty Spirit of God is stirring within you. Try—for as we only learn to think by thinking, and only learn to walk by walking, so we only learn to trust by trusting. Wait on the Lord, and when you can rise above the wooden common-places of existence, and withdraw yourself from “the things that are seen,” there will come high, rarefied, exalted moments in which you will be quickened and enraptured into a life beyond all definition; and at last you will know that you have the true faith from knowing that you have the true life—the life that flows from faith—life in the branch from life in “The Vine.”

THE END.



